THE BIG CHANGE

Excerpts from Address of Roy E. Larsen to the American Association of School Administrators, Atlantic City, New Jersey, February 17, 1953.

A Foreword By Governor Umstead

The long way that North Carolina climbed to bring about the "Big Change" cited by Mr. Larsen is strikingly presented in the facts and figures he used in his speech to the school administrators of America, excerpts from which comprise this booklet.

Mr. Larsen correctly attributes in large measure North Carolina's rise to economic and cultural leadership within a half century to its steady and determined progress in public education that began with the administration of Governor Charles Brantley Aycock in 1900.

This is a success story told by an authority, not only in the publishing business, but also in the field of education, as Mr. Larsen is Chairman of the National Citizens Commission for the Public Schools. It is a message with meaning both to North Carolinians and to others living beyond its borders and deserves the thoughtful attention of everyone concerned with the social and economic problems of today.

By Roy E. Larsen
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Recently I decided to see if I could support, through documentation, my own conviction that our system of universal education has been an indispensable factor in the astounding development of this country which Frederick Lewis Allen describes in his best seller, "The Big Change."

For this purpose, I selected the State of North Carolina which, at the turn of the century, was a poor state, and today ranks as one of the leaders, not only of the South, but of the nation, in statecraft, in industry, and in education.

In the last 50 years, while the population of the South was increasing by 88% and the population of the nation as a whole by 98%, the population of North Carolina increased by 113%. In the past twelve years, a total of 5,047 new businesses have poured into the state. Long the national leader in the manufacture of tobacco products (North Carolina now produces more than half of the nation's cigarettes 55%), the state now also leads the nation in the manufacture of textile products and wooden furniture.

North Carolina's current prosperity, then, was one of the reasons why I became interested in tracing its development.

How poor was North Carolina at the turn of the century? Although its population was close to two million, there were only 70,570 North Carolinians employed in industry at the time, and they were receiving an annual salary of $196.52, which was about *half* the annual average salary working the country over. In value added by manufacture of all kinds in the year 1899, North Carolina ranked 22nd among the states, with a total figure of $40 million. In value of farm property it also ranked 22nd.

In the North Carolina of 1900 there were 20 white illiterates for every one hundred of the white population over ten years of age. If the number of Negro illiterates were averaged into this figure, the illiteracy rate would, of course, be even higher.

There were exactly nine public libraries to serve North Carolina's reading public in 1900, and although there were 27 daily newspapers, the circulation of the most popular one, the *Raleigh News and Observer*, was only 5,800. The *combined* circulation of the five most popular periodicals published in North Carolina in 1900 was 37 thousand.

As we might expect, the public school system was deplorable. R. D. W. Connor and Clarence Poe, in their excellent book, *The Life and Speeches of Charles B. Aycock*, have described the situation when Aycock became Governor in January, 1901, as follows:

"At that time . . . 'North Carolina did not believe in public education.' Only 30 districts in the state, all urban, considered education of sufficient importance to levy a school tax for the support of the schools. The average salary paid to county superintendents annually was less than one dollar a day, to public school teachers, $91.25 for the term . . . There were no professional teachers in the public school. Practically no interest was manifested in the building or equipment of schoolhouses. The children of more than 950 public school districts were altogether without schoolhouses, while those in 1,132 districts sat on rough pine boards in log houses chinked with clay. Perhaps under all these circumstances," concluded Connor and Poe, "it was well enough that the schools were kept open only 73 days in the year and that less than *one-third* of the children of school age attended them."